

## Grace Hill Settlement House *Sharing American Values*

by  
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Throughout the country, the story is the same: low-income families, particularly the growing number of refugees and immigrants both in urban and rural communities, fail to take advantage of the community resources available to them. It's not that they're unwilling or hostile – generally, it's because they simply don't know what is there for them or, knowing what's there, they don't have the skills to take the next step. Sometimes, their own life experiences have pushed things like education and health care to the bottom of the list of priorities.



Organizations like the Grace Hill Settlement House in St. Louis have been working for decades to serve low-income families and match them with the services and resources they most need. Under a TOP-supported initiative, Grace Hill – which regularly serves between 2,000 and 4,000 low-income families – is developing a new program for families at its Head Start center in South St. Louis.



The project is a partnership of Grace Hill, Washington University, the International Institute, Youth in Need (Head Start), and Forest Park Community College, along with area companies. It creates a bi-lingual web interface to improve accessibility to information. The system delivers Head Start parent orientation and training courses on Child Care, Parenting, Wellness, and Nutrition online; provides parents with information on their children's Head Start progress; and provides access to other preventive health care information. The system also creates a mechanism for email between patients and physicians.

Grace Hill will place computers in selected client homes in order to test the viability this kind of direct, home-based program delivery system. Participants include 600 Head Start families enrolled in Grace Hill's nationally recognized Member Organized Resource Exchange (M.O.R.E.). These families come from Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Vietnam, Central and South America, and parts of the former Soviet Union.

Participants will be able to access the information they need on their own time, and in a manner that encourages participation and exploration. One of the principal project partners, United

Neighborhood Centers of America, will help to disseminate project results across the country. The Missouri Department of Social Services will do the same for non-profits throughout the state. Using familiar technology, the project should yield important lessons about how information technology can help overcome the learning deficits that are the inevitable accompaniment of poverty and cultural dislocation. Grace Hill's newest initiative reaches out to families and to users who are almost never even part of the digital age equation.